

Council at Large:

Mr. Joshua Goldstein
Mr. Johan Lopez
Ms. Nicol Ayers

Mr. Jesse Buccolo
Mr. Colin Hosten

District A:

Mr. Jalin Sead

Mr. Broderick Sawyer

District B:

Mr. Dajuan Wiggins

Ms. Darlene Young

District C:

Ms. Nicolé Eaddy

Ms. Anne Wennerstrand

District D:

Mr. Jan Degenshein

Mr. Richard Dellinger

District E:

Mr. James Frayer

Mr. Brian Bailey

I. ROLL CALL

Mr. Goldstein called the special meeting of the Norwalk City Council to order. Roll call was taken and a quorum was present.

II. MAYOR SMYTH WELCOME

Mayor Smyth welcomed all council members to the orientation meeting. She expressed her pleasure at continuing to work with the council in her new role as mayor and emphasized the importance of collaboration among all Democratic council members, noting that agreement on every issue is not required. She highlighted the opportunity to discuss processes, conflicts of interest, roles and responsibilities, and legislative priorities for the term.

She also provided an update on the impending snowstorm, announcing that a snow emergency had been declared effective at 2:00 PM that day. She urged residents to remove vehicles from city streets, utilize available parking at the Yankee Doodle Garage and Maritime Garage, and use warming centers as needed. She specifically reminded residents not to park at City Hall or schools to facilitate Department of Public Works operations.

III. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Ms. Diane Lauricella 21 Little Fox Lane addressed the council. She thanked the council for allowing public attendance and participation in the orientation session. She advocated for council members, boards, commissions, and the mayor's office to lead by example, including promptly responding to constituent communications. She encouraged creative public outreach beyond social media, including use of the press, and suggested improvements to Zoom meeting permissions such as enabling video and chat features.

She listed several legislative priorities, including stronger enforcement of all city laws, a holistic approach to waste management, energy policy, coastal resilience and flooding, increased council capacity for due diligence and oversight, and additional focus on these issues based on her professional background in energy, waste management, and hazardous materials. She indicated she would submit her comments in writing.

No other members of the public wished to speak. Public participation was closed.

**IV. GENERAL DISCUSSION OF THE ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF
MEMBERS OF THE NORWALK CITY COUNCIL**

Mr. Goldstein thanked Ms. Murillo, Assistant City Clerk, for her extensive work updating the council handbook to reflect current organizational structure, district maps, and charter changes. He also acknowledged Ms. Young's prior contributions to the handbook. He encouraged all members to review the handbook thoroughly, noting it includes the organizational chart, council roles, contact information, department descriptions, committee assignments, council rules adopted January 5, 2026, and ethics rules. He announced that Freedom of Information training would be scheduled with Corporation Counsel Mario Coppola and that Mr. Coppola would join the meeting shortly to discuss conflicts of interest.

Ms. Ayers raised concerns about inconsistencies in email distribution of agendas and materials due to the recent transition to new city email addresses. Mr. Goldstein acknowledged the issue and committed to working with the IT department to resolve it.

V. DISCUSSION OF LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

Mr. Goldstein opened a discussion of legislative priorities for the term. He emphasized the importance of working through the committee process, collaborating with committee chairs and city staff, and maintaining respectful communication with staff. He invited each council member to share their priorities without immediate debate.

Mr. Degenshein expressed concern about potential changes to privacy protections following the recent election cycle. He prioritized greater equity and funding in education, increased affordable housing (including for those who are housing challenged or homeless), and stronger environmental sustainability and resilience, particularly in renewable energy.

Ms. Ayers identified housing (for all income levels and generations) as her top priority. She stressed the need for comprehensive council training and professional development. She also advocated for a holistic focus on the needs and aspirations of young people across all city departments and committees, and better promotion and management of city-owned amenities and properties.

Mr. Bucculo emphasized aggressive pursuit of grants and the establishment of a Children's Cabinet to better coordinate city, school, and community efforts supporting children, youth, and families.

Ms. Wennerstrand prioritized strengthening mental health and well-being supports for children, teens, and caregivers, including partnerships with the new community center. She also supported implementation of a stormwater utility program to fund climate-resilient infrastructure and a vacant storefront fee to promote fiscal equity and neighborhood vitality.

Ms. Young highlighted the ongoing need for progress on housing, the creation of a dedicated grants coordination function, improved coordination between blight and zoning enforcement, enhanced parking enforcement, and renewed attention to recommendations from prior efficiency studies and the Plan of Conservation and Development.

Ms. Ayers asked how the council would organize and track progress on the discussed priorities. Mr. Goldstein agreed that housing emerged as the clear top priority mentioned by multiple members. He committed to compiling and distributing a summary of priorities, distilling common themes, and ensuring regular updates during caucus meetings. He noted that many initiatives would proceed through relevant committees and emphasized the value of small groups taking the lead on specific issues.

Additional topics raised included the need for stronger state-level advocacy on issues such as bait-and-switch practices and traffic safety, the potential value of Connecticut Conference of Municipalities training resources, council safety concerns (including threats to members' homes and improvements to City Hall security), the possibility of city-provided Google Voice numbers or alternative contact methods, legislative budget reform, and accommodations for council parking during major city events.

Mr. Goldstein indicated he would compile the priorities into a document for review and future reference, with the expectation that progress would be tracked and reported regularly.

Mr. Goldstein resumed the round-robin discussion of legislative priorities, inviting remaining members to share their top items.

Mr. Frayer emphasized the creation of a Stormwater Authority, which would identify sources of stormwater runoff, allocate costs more equitably (potentially shifting approximately 17% of the burden from residential to commercial properties, representing several million dollars), and support conservation efforts. He advocated for increasing city revenue through review of city-owned properties to identify excess or idle parcels (such as the property on Phillow Street) that could be repurposed for affordable or cluster housing. He proposed forming a Finance Committee subcommittee to examine these properties, review annual departmental performance reports more regularly (including inviting departments such as Public Works and the Board of Education to present during the year), and monitor spending to prevent end-of-year rushes. He also supported expanding Section 8/202 housing opportunities, noting pending federal legislation that may increase HUD funding.

Mr. Lopez agreed with many priorities already raised and added the importance of greater public engagement and education to reduce misunderstandings, improve transparency, and inform residents about city initiatives and processes.

Mr. Sawyer focused on distinguishing and addressing illegal versus non-permitted housing, increasing public transparency on the issue, reducing light pollution and light trespass (citing examples such as volleyball tournament lighting), continuing affordable housing efforts including conversion of vacant office space (noting ongoing work on Route 7), improving traffic

flow at Exit 14 off I-95 (including exploring block-the-box striping and police enforcement), and reinstating a multi-department “Fly Squad” involving Police, Fire, Planning and Zoning, and Health departments to tackle non-permitted apartments.

Mr. Hosten expressed concern for vulnerable residents’ ability to afford living and thriving in Norwalk. He supported microgrants for housing and groceries modeled on successful programs elsewhere and emphasized generating additional revenue through state-level advocacy, including exploring a quarter-percent municipal sales tax retained locally. He advocated for targeted tax relief for vulnerable residents rather than uniform standards and highlighted the opportunity to leverage strong relationships with state and federal partners following Mayor Smyth’s inauguration.

Mr. Sead stressed overall affordability, noting that many council priorities require funding ultimately derived from taxpayers. He supported examining the financial impact of proposed ordinances and initiatives to avoid pricing out residents. He endorsed council training for greater effectiveness.

Mr. Bailey highlighted education budgeting and financing, noting ongoing parental concerns from prior teacher layoff threats and the need to advocate for increased Education Cost Sharing (ECS) funding from the state. He proposed developing a citywide AI strategy to improve efficiency (such as in grant writing) and suggested creating a monthly City Council newsletter (potentially customizable by district) to enhance communication with constituents, with AI assistance possible.

Mr. Dellinger prioritized fiscal responsibility and grant writing to save money, sustainability (including expanding solar and alternative energy), improved communication with constituents (including a proactive newsletter similar to Parks and Recreation’s and better recruitment for boards and commissions to attract high-quality applicants), and housing (acknowledging it as an area needing development).

Ms. Eaddy prioritized advancing the affordable housing ordinance to establish and fund an affordable housing account through the relevant committee. She advocated for creative housing solutions for middle-income residents, downsizers, elders, and seniors, recognizing housing’s intersection with mental health, traffic, and overall well-being. She supported expanding microforests and greenhouse gardening for fresh produce access in food deserts, improving public safety (citing an incident at the Conservatory School), addressing parking challenges for visitors in developments, and ensuring robust public involvement in development projects from early stages.

Mr. Goldstein added public safety concerns related to high-speed electric scooters and motorized vehicles, supported exploring a vacant storefront fee to address rent increases, suggested reviewing the efficiency study through an AI lens for clerical task reduction, endorsed implementing the Affordable Housing Plan recommendation for a program to preserve and upgrade naturally affordable (market-rate) units, advocated aggressive business development and retention efforts (including addressing recent closures such as Sedona, Yard House, and

Pinstripe), and emphasized implementing the Tree Master Plan by prioritizing tree planting in the urban core (particularly South Norwalk) as part of permitting and development requirements.

Mr. Sawyer added concerns about aftermarket scooter batteries (citing a recent fire) and electric vehicle chargers in residential buildings (noting ordinances in other municipalities and a prior incident), and proposed apartment inspection fees to generate revenue for affordable housing or tax relief.

Ms. Ayers asked how the council would organize, prioritize, and track progress on the many ideas raised. Mr. Goldstein responded that housing emerged as the clear top shared priority. He committed to compiling and distributing a summarized list of priorities, distilling common themes, and ensuring regular progress updates during caucus meetings. He emphasized working through committees, assigning leads or small groups to initiatives, maintaining accountability, and incorporating brief priority updates into caucus agendas. He noted many items would proceed via committee process and highlighted the value of strategic focus amid day-to-day demands. He also supported stronger, unified lobbying of the state delegation on council priorities.

Additional discussion occurred regarding state-controlled elements (e.g., major traffic thoroughfares), leveraging Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (CCM) and other training resources, potential council parking accommodations for special events, council safety concerns (including threats to members' homes, council chamber security, use of Google Voice numbers, and removal of personal contact information from public listings), and possible reform of the legislative budget.

Mr. Goldstein indicated he would prepare and circulate a priorities document for review and revision.

VI. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Corporation Counsel Mario Coppola addressed the council regarding conflicts of interest and the appearance of conflicts. He explained that each council member must independently determine whether they have a conflict of interest or an appearance of conflict that would disqualify them from participating in consideration of a matter. A conflict exists when a member would consider an application or matter differently than they would for someone else due to personal or financial reasons, including family members, in-laws, business partners, individuals with whom the member has business interests, or those with whom the member has an ongoing significant personal or business relationship.

Mr. Coppola emphasized that knowing someone or having minor past involvement with an organization does not automatically create a conflict. He noted that the determination becomes more nuanced with personal relationships and advised using the "birthday party test": if the individual would be invited to a birthday party for the member or their spouse/partner, a conflict likely exists. He stressed that the appearance of a conflict is often more significant than an actual

conflict, as it can undermine public confidence in the council. Case law and the city's Code of Ethics require recusal in cases of appearance of impropriety.

Mr. Coppola advised a conservative approach, particularly given the council's 15-0 majority composition, which may attract heightened scrutiny. He recommended erring on the side of recusal when a situation is a close call.

He provided examples of when recusal is appropriate (e.g., relatives by marriage even if not well-known) and when it is generally not required (e.g., casual neighborhood acquaintances or former youth sports connections). He encouraged members to contact him directly for confidential guidance on potential conflicts, offering his direct office number (203-571-1707) and stating that Mr. Goldstein would distribute his cell phone number privately. Mr. Coppola stated he is available at any time, including weekends, to discuss potential conflicts via email, text, or call.

Ms. Young asked about the consequences of failing to recuse oneself or violating the Code of Ethics. Mr. Coppola explained that the city has a Code of Ethics and an Ethics Commission. Anyone may file a complaint alleging a violation, such as participating in a matter with a conflict of interest. Complaints remain confidential unless an investigating committee determines there is sufficient basis to proceed to a hearing. The Ethics Commission has broad authority to address violations, which could include removal from the council. He recommended that all members read the Code of Ethics and the accompanying guidebook.

Mr. Goldstein thanked Mr. Coppola and reiterated that Mr. Coppola serves as counsel to the council for all council-related matters. He encouraged members to reach out to Mr. Coppola with any ethical questions and noted that the Code of Ethics is included in the council handbook. He added that if a member is questioning whether to recuse themselves, they should likely do so, but discussion with Mr. Coppola is always advisable.

Mr. Coppola commended the council, stating it is one of the strongest groups he has worked with and expressing confidence in their ability to accomplish great things. He wished the members well and exited the meeting.

No further questions were raised.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

****MS. AYERS MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING.**

****THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 12:00 PM.

**Respectfully submitted,
Courtney Baldwin,**

**CITY COUNCIL
NORWALK,
CONNECTICUT**

**SPECIAL MEETING
7:30 PM**

**JANUARY 24, 2026
HYBRID VIA ZOOM**

Recording Secretary